LIBRARY OF PRIN
JUL 29 19
THEOLOGICAL SEM

THE WEAK CHURCH
AND THE
STRONG MAN

OSWORTH

BV
4010
.B67
1909

7 29.09

Library of the Theological Seminary

PRINCETON, N. J.

BV 4010 .B67 1909
Bosworth, Edward Increase,
1861-1927.
The weak church and the
strong man

Claims and Opportunities of the Christian Ministry

LIBRARY OF PRINCETON
JUL 29 1909
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY.

THE WEAK CHURCH AND THE STRONG MAN

BY

EDWARD INCREASE BOSWORTH

DEAN OF OBERLIN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

NEW YORK

STUDENT YOUNG MEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION

124 EAST TWENTY-EIGHTH STREET

1909

Copyright, 1909, by
The International Committee of Young Men's
Christian Associations

The Claims and Opportunities of the Christian Ministry

A SERIES OF PAMPHLETS
EDITED BY JOHN R. MOTT

THE WEAK CHURCH AND THE STRONG MAN

By EDWARD INCREASE BOSWORTH

SERIES OF PAMPHLETS ON THE

Claims and Opportunities of the Christian Ministry

The Claims of the Ministry on Strong Men
By George Angier Gordon

The Right Sort of Men for the Ministry
By William Fraser McDowell

The Modern Interpretation of the Call to the Ministry
By Edward Increase Bosworth

The Preparation of the Modern Minister
By Walter William Moore

The Minister and His People
By Phillips Brooks

The Minister and the Community
By Woodrow Wilson

The Call of the Country Church
By Arthur Stephen Hoyt

The Weak Church and the Strong Man
By Edward Increase Bosworth

The Minister as Preacher
By Charles Edward Jefferson

Letter from President Roosevelt
On the Call of the Nation for Able Men to Lead the Forces of Christianity

THE WEAK CHURCH AND THE STRONG MAN

I mean by the weak church, the church that has a chance to grow without doing detriment to any other church. I do not mean the situation in which there are four or five churches where there ought to be but one. That situation constitutes no "field." It constitutes a hole and a man does not want to get into a hole. He wants to get into a field.

First picture the weak church in its darkest colors. Its membership is small. So is its salary. Its debt is of more respectable dimensions. The building is weather-worn, the lightning-rod broken, and the weather-vane on the spire firmly askew. The music is poor, the prayer-meetings are dreary and artificial. The membership lacks unity. What the Smiths want the Joneses oppose. The few people who gather for Sabbath services look about with critical eyes and after service report with gossipy tongues the results of their observations. There are stern souls

who watch suspiciously for any utterance from the pulpit that bears an unfamiliar sound. They allow their minister small liberty to proclaim ideas that have brought him relief and inspiration in his effort to express historic religious verities in the vernacular of modern thought. This is the picture in its gloomiest shades. The average "weak church" warrants a far more hopeful description.

Next, look at the strong man. He is a manly man, not a ladies' man or desirous to be ornamental at a pink tea. He does not desire to be coddled by any one. He is strong in friendship, strong in persistence, strong in self-control, not angered by criticism. He is strong in his grip on certain fundamental truths and has some power at least to put those truths before people in language that will command their attention. He has strong confidence in the reality and nearness of the spiritual world.

What can the strong man do in the weak church? It is of no use to send a weak man to a weak church. That has been done a great many times and with little appreciable result. But what can the strong man do in the weak church? The strong man can win the critical person in the pew by the unfailing

courtesy and invincible good-will with which he thanks his critics for their suggestions and promises to give them careful consideration. The critical man will soon be his friend.

He can win the intolerant man in the pew. He will not talk about "new" and "old" theology. He will state his reasons for the view he does not hold more fairly and forcibly than can the man in the pew who does hold it. The intolerant man will be surprised by his pastor's fairness and will become his friend, though not his disciple it may be. The strong man will not preach his doubts. He will preach the things that he believes, and the things that he believes to have a vital bearing upon the lives of men. He will show lucidly just why he believes them and just what their bearing on life is.

He will make it evident to all that he is an honest friend, that his profound ambition is to introduce men into the discipleship of Jesus Christ, that he has a level head and a genius for hard work. Then after a time he will find that he can say to his people anything that his conscience dictates, and only on rare occasions will he experience serious discomfort for having done so.

What can the strong man do in the community outside the weak church? He can get hold of the boys and be a true friend to them. He will be interested in their athletics. He can get hold of the young men; he can get hold of the business men. He can be influential in the intellectual life of the community, in its schools, reading circles, and lecture courses. He can set the boys and girls toward college. He can unobtrusively give dignity, genuineness, and tone to the social life of the community. He can be connected with every movement that makes for the welfare of the people in the community. He can go down into the edge of the death shadow and speak brave words to dying men. He will stand beside the little grave in the country cemetery and comfort with courageous words the bitter grief of those who are closest to it.

He can reach out into the religious life of the people. In a very short time he can unobtrusively begin an investigation of the religious life of scores of men in the community and of scores of families on the farms in the surrounding country. He can find out what their religious antecedents were and what their present religious outlook is. He will work through

the members of his church that are the neighbors of these people. In due time he will begin to bring his personal influence to bear upon them one by one. He will put his shoulder under their burdens, his conscience against their sins, and, if he is the strong man I have pictured, he will not have been very long in that community before he will see men and women, one after another, coming up to the church to confess Jesus Christ as their Lord. He will send up to the city churches men trained in his church for service. The country church is the school in which the leadership of the city church is developed.

He will stay with the church three years, five years, ten years, perhaps all his life. Perhaps after awhile he will go. Go where? God knows to what other church he will go. Perhaps to another church in the condition in which this one was when he came to it. Perhaps he will go to some larger church. This sentence from Charles Kingsley stood for many years over my desk: "Have thy tools ready. God will find thee work."

It is not only true that the strong man can do a great deal for the weak church. The weak church can do a great deal for the strong man. After he

has been its pastor, if necessary all his life, he will find that his own life is enlarged. In the process of making the weak church strong he has gained strength himself. What enlarges the life of a man is to enter into the life of other men with sympathy and help. He will find that he has enlarged himself intellectually. It will tax him to put these great truths effectively before the people. Many of the people have keen minds and will eagerly take the best he can give them. It is an intellectual triumph of no mean order, so to present a truth as to make it grip less active minds. At the end of life, when he draws near to the great quietness and looks back across the years, able to see with clearer vision the things that have been elemental and fundamental in his life, he will experience great satisfactions such as come to few other men. If you question the men who, in their later life have been pastors of city churches but who in early life preached in small communities, you will, over and over again, find them citing as the memory that gives them most satisfaction something that happened in the early years in the small church. One Sunday evening a number of young ministers asked a distinguished

Methodist bishop what it was in his life, the memory of which gave him most satisfaction. He had been preacher, college president, bishop. He thought a moment and then told them of an experience in his first small parish and its outcome in the life of a single family in later years.

The weak church appeals to the strong man to come to it in the power of God and make it, by God's grace, a strong church. Rather it is Jesus Christ who makes the appeal, for what is done to one of these least is done to Him.

Princeton Theological Seminary-Speer Library
1 1012 01032 7544